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## **An Assessment of the Profile of Bahir Dar University Teachers**

Adane Tessera\*

### **Introduction**

Bahir Dar University as an institution of higher learning is expected to provide quality education. The provision of quality education among other things, requires qualified academic personnel. This short paper deals with the assessment of the profile of the instructors of the Faculty of Education, Bahir Dar University. The discussions and presentations here are based on the personal experience of the writer as a member of the faculty.

### **An Assessment of Teachers' Profile**

The profile of higher education teacher is usually mentioned under three main ingredients - teaching, research and community service. These are also elements by which teachers are judged whether they receive promotion to a higher ladder. A closer look into each of these elements by making the Faculty of Education, Bahir Dar University, as a reference point is, thus the concern of this paper.

### **Teaching**

Although excellent teaching is the main goal of institutions of higher education, quality teaching has various definitions to different people. Some consider quality teachers as progressives who take into account student experiences, diagnose difficulties and permit remedial measures. (Yoakam and Simpson as cited in Sherman et al., 1987). Others also view excellent teaching as the ability to adapt teaching behavior and techniques to the capabilities of students. As there are differences in the definition given by theorists teachers also view teaching from their own perspectives and understandings. In our

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institution to a great number of teachers teaching is viewed as leading and helping students to learn.

This view maintains teaching as bringing students into intellectual contact with a variety of information and materials by transmitting through some means. Teaching is not a mere transmission of information from the teacher as a source to the students as passive receivers. Such an assumption has led many of them to believe excellence in teaching is a mere function of subject matter knowledge. However, the literature and research findings suggest the use of a variety of teaching methods and techniques. Personal observations indicate that by and large our students are most of the time involved in listening to formal and structured presentation of the lecturer. This, however, does not seem to conform with research evidence which suggests that students should do more than just listen. Good teachers are expected to encourage the learners to read, write, discuss and solve problems and construct their own understanding.

In contrast, for various reasons (lack of awareness, training and competence, etc. in teaching methodology) for a significant number of the staff, teaching effectiveness is only the function of a good knowledge of the subject matter. Some hesitations observed in the inclusion of pedagogical/professional courses in the curriculum and lack of allocating appropriate length of time for the teaching practice could partially be explained by the misunderstanding of how we can have excellent teachers. This is an evidence where one's belief influences his practice. Observations, though not systematic, show that students assignment in the form of projects, and term-papers are rarely given in many of the departments. The types of examination given seem to encourage students to memorize facts. This would in the final analysis result in a situation where learning is meant for assessment rather than assessment being for learning, accountability and administration. Among the important reasons for such a misunderstanding is that many of the instructors were not trained to be teachers (Adane, 2000). However, there are also other factors that contribute to failure of instructors' use of a variety of teaching

methods such as class-size, heavy teaching load, absence of relevant reference or materials, books and lack of instructional technologies .

### **Teachers as Researchers**

The second element in the profile of a higher education teacher is that he should be a researcher. Teachers' in higher education are expected to generate and extend the frontiers of knowledge through research and experimentations. The advantages of being engaged in research activities include the following:

- research enhances the quality of teaching and learning because teaching and research are symbiotic;
- research helps the teacher to keep himself up-to-date with the changing methods, materials and literature in his area of specialization; and
- research helps the individual teacher move up the career ladder.

However, personal observation and a research finding indicate that there is no significant move in research activities among Bahir Dar University instructors since a significant number of instructors are not involved (Ađane, 2000). The most frequently noted reasons for this are lack of expertise, or experience, in the field of educational research, heavy teaching load, lack of journals, etc. In general, many of the reasons they listed could be subsumed as personal and institutional variables. This situation affects the quality of teaching in that many of us (teachers) are not supporting our lessons with research based evidence. Quite clearly, teachers who are not doing research about their teaching and related problems cannot encourage self-directed and discovery learning among their students. One cannot have the reason and confidence to make others relate theory to practice without himself being engaged in such a practice. The

consequence in teaching will then remain a tell-hear-tell practice i.e. mere transmission of information.

### **Community Service**

This is the third component in the profile of a higher education teacher. It is argued that a teacher in higher education in addition to teaching and research is expected to serve the university and the outside community. In this regard instructors of Bahir Dar University are providing a wide variety of services to the in-campus and outside community. A list of some of the major in-side university services includes committee membership, office administration, curriculum preparation and revision, etc.

Similarly, instructors are participating in various committees in the community. They take assignments, provide sensitization lectures on local AIDS prevention, lead environmental protection activities, and serve as resource persons in their area of specialization. (e.g. the Geography Department usually cooperates with Agricultural Bureau of the Region, staff members from the pedagogical science work in areas related to curriculum assessment for the planned agricultural institute at Wereta) etc.

However, as discussed above it seems that Bahir Dar University instructors have a lot to do in bringing themselves up to a reasonably accepted level of profile. They should be assisted to raise teaching and research excellence. For this to materialize, continuous training in methods of teaching, educational research, evaluation of teaching and learning etc. is necessary. In addition, on the basis of the future scheme of higher education selection of the future academic staff should give priority to those who have taken professional (pedagogical) courses.